

# THE INDYPENDENT

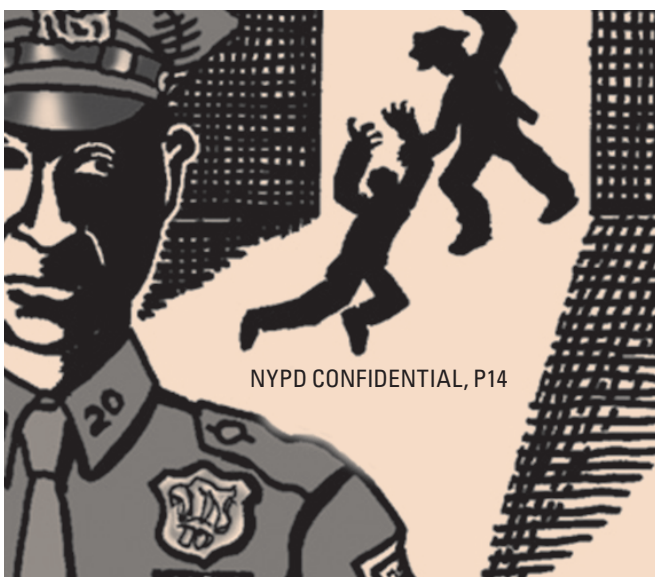
Issue #148, March 12 – March 31, 2010  
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

## BRINGING HOPE TO HAITI

**NYC Doctor Melissa  
Barber, trained in  
Cuba, shares her  
inspiring story.**

**By Renée Feltz, Page 6**

PHOTO: SOPHIE FORBES



NYPD CONFIDENTIAL, P14



COMMUNITY  
MEDIA IN  
LATIN AMERICA, P10



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REFORM, P4





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*The Independent* is a New York-based free newspaper published 17 times a year on Fridays to our print and online readership of more than 200,000. It is produced by a network of volunteers who report, write, edit, draw, design, take photos, distribute, fundraise and provide website management. Since 2000, more than 650 citizen journalists, artists and media activists have participated in this project. Winner of more than 50 New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Independent* is dedicated to empowering people to create a true alternative to the corporate press by encouraging people to produce their own media. *The Independent* is funded by subscriptions, donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising from organizations with similar missions. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of people locally and globally. *The Independent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

*The Independent* is affiliated with the New York City Independent Media Center, which is part of the global Indymedia movement, an international network that is dedicated to fostering grassroots media production, and to *IndyKids*, a children's newspaper. NYC IMC is an open publishing website where anyone can publish news (nyc.indymedia.org.)

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## community calendar

SUBMIT YOUR EVENTS AT  
INDYEVENTS@GMAIL.COM.

FRI-SUN MARCH 19-21

Fri: 7pm-9pm; Sat/Sun 10am-9pm

See website for admission fees.

CONFERENCE: LEFT FORUM. "The Center Cannot Hold: Rekindling the Radical Imagination." Last year's conference had more than 200 panels, 600 speakers and 3,000 attendees. Join us this year. Pace University, 1 Pace Plaza 212-817-2003 • leftforum.org

FRI MARCH 19

Noon • Free

RIDE: BUREAU OF ORGANIZED

BIKELANE SAFETY. The newly formed

Bureau of Organized Bikelane Safety

team invites cyclists to join a ride through

Midtown bike lanes. The ride is intended

to promote safety and increased en-

forcement in bike lanes. Rally to follow in

Bryant Park at 12:45pm.

Meet at Madison Square Park, 23rd and

Broadway • 917-494-8164 • times-up.org

SAT MARCH 20

7pm • \$10

READINGS: WOMEN'S HISTORY

MONTH POETRY. Join poets Prisonera,

Gloria Fontanez, Seary, Maria Aponte,

Passion, Mia and Jamica for "Yes We

Can: Women's History Month Poetry."

Nuyorican Poets Cafe, 236 E 3rd St

212-780-9386 • nuyorican.org

7:30 pm • \$13

SCREENING: TIBET IN HARLEM. *The*

*Search*, directed by Padma Tseten, is a

road movie that explores a disappear-

ing culture as it follows a Tibetan film

director's search for actors for his next

film followed by a discussion with the

filmmaker.

Maysles Institute, 343 Lenox Ave

212-582-6050 • mayslesinstitute.org

MON MARCH 22

7pm • Free

SCREENING: DEATH AND TAXES. The

military consumes 30 percent of federal

spending, according to the War Resisters

League. In this 30-minute documentary,

more than 20 people explain why and

how they refuse to fund war. Followed by

a discussion.

Judson Memorial Church, 241 W Thomp-

son St • 718-768-7306 • warresisters.org

7PM • FREE

READING: A POST-CAPITALIST

FUTURE. Political economists Leo

Panitch and Sam Gindin will read from

and discuss their new book, *In and Out*

*of Crisis: The Global Financial Meltdown*

*and Left Alternatives.*

Bluestockings, 172 Allen St

212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

7pm • Free

READING: ART AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.

Beverly Naidus will read from her new

book, *Arts For Change: Teaching Outside*

*the Frame.* There will also be a discussion

with some of the featured artists.

Revolution Books, 146 W 26th St

212-691-3345 • revolutionbooksnyc.org

TUE MARCH 23

7pm • \$5 Sugg

DISCUSSION: DIRECT ACTION IN

HEALTHCARE ACTIVISM. Katie Robbins

of Heathcare-NOW!, Dr. Laura Boylan

of Physicians for a National Health

Program, and Laurie Wen of ACT Up will

discuss how to bring the single-payer op-

tion back into the healthcare discussion.

Bluestockings, 172 Allen St

212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

7:30pm • \$13

SCREENING: SPOTLIGHT ON EMERG-

ING FILMMAKERS. *Four Rivers*, directed

by Tenzin Phuntsog, presents a series of

vignettes of the Mount Kailash region in

Tibet. A discussion with the filmmakers

will follow.

Maysles Institute, 343 Lenox Ave

212-582-6050 • mayslesinstitute.org

THUR MARCH 25

7PM • FREE

DISCUSSION: FBI ENTRAPMENT.

Activists, lawyers and family members

of alleged suspects will share stories of

FBI entrapment, preemptive prosecution

and the targeting of Muslim communities

since 9/11.

40 Washington Sq S, Vanderbilt Rm 220,

NYU • Globalvoiceforjustice.uma.hm

SAT MARCH 27

10am-4pm • \$35/\$55

SEMINAR: CAPITAL: A CRITIQUE OF

THE PRESENT. Randy Martin will pres-

ent a 1-day seminar using Marx's *Capital*

to understand present circumstances.

Martin is the author of *On Your Marx:*

*Rethinking Socialism and the Left and*

*Financializing of Daily Life.*

Brecht Forum, 451 West St

212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

1pm-4pm • Free

SCREENING: YOUTH VOICES UNCEN-

SORED. The winning films from the

National Coalition Against Censorship's

Sixth Annual film contest will be shown.

Poet Kahilil Almustafa will perform.

Ticket reservation recommended.

New York Film Academy, 100 E 17th St

212-807-6222x19 • yfen@ncac.org

SUN MARCH 28

11:15am • Free

TALK: "NEW YORK'S OTHER ENVIRON-

MENTAL HISTORY." This talk will high-

light the efforts of women and people

of color toward establishing parks and

green space in New York City.

New York Society for Ethical Culture,

2 W 64th St • 212-874-5210 • nysec.org

1pm-4:30pm • Free

FORUM: NUCLEAR WEAPONS-FREE

WORLD. Actor, writer and United Na-

tions representative Vinnie Burrows

will moderate this forum with Dr. Horace

G. Campbell, Frida Berrigan and Judith

LeBlanc.

The Riverside Church, Assembly Hall,

490 Riverside Dr

grannypeacebrigade.org

grannypeacebrigade.org

THUR MARCH 25, 6:30PM • FREE

LECTURE: Workers rights and the triangle shirtwaist fire. On the 99th anniversary

of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, David Von Drehle, author of *The Fire That*

*Changed America*, will discuss how the fire, which killed 146 workers, impacted

workers' rights.

TENEMENT MUSEUM, 108 ORCHARD ST • 212-982-8420 • TENEMENT.org

Brecht Forum, 451 West St

212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

1pm-4pm • Free

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LeBlanc.

The Riverside Church, Assembly Hall,

490 Riverside Dr

grannypeacebrigade.org

grannypeacebrigade.org

THUR APRIL 1

4pm-5pm • Free

VIGIL: 2,100 POLITICAL PRISONERS.

Amnesty International activists host

bi-weekly vigils to bring attention to

the case of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

Aung San Suu Kyi and the 2,100 political

prisoners being held in Myanmar.

Myanmar Mission, 10 E 77th St

212-633-4215 • amnestyusa.org/suukyi

7pm • \$5 Sugg

PRESENTATION: "GRAVEYARD

OF EMPIRES." This presentation by

Afghan-American sisters Laimah and

Wazhmah Osma will examine the reali-

ties in Afghanistan, the increased U.S.

military presence there and the role of

the Western media in the war on terror.

Bluestockings, 172 Allen St

212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

FRI APRIL 2

7pm • \$7

READING: A WORLD OF POETRY. The

Zephyr Poets of Los Angeles will read

along with New York-based writers

about war, loss and identity sexuality.

Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery

212-614-0505 • bowerypoetry.com

## reader comments

Post your own comments online at the end of each article or email letters@indypendent.org.

INFLUENCING ELECTIONS

*Response to "Corporations Unleashed: Landmark Supreme Court decision to allow unlimited spending in federal elections," Feb. 19:*

An excellent and informative article about what could be the defining issue over the next several years. The way it's set up now, no matter who gets elected, corporations will win and the public will lose. Public Citizen is working to build a grassroots movement to fight the court's ruling at dontgetrolled.org.

—RICK CLAYPOOL

AMERICAN NA'VI

*Response to "With Avatar Poised to Win Big at the Oscars, James Cameron Should*



*Help Some Na'vi Right Here on Earth," IndyBlog Feb. 26:*

Remember also to include the native folks of our very own North American continent in

your call for fair dealings, the tribes who were squeezed off any land that might vaguely have some value. Americans (and I'm speaking of people in the United States) tend to conveniently forget the work they need to do right at home.

—T. KURTERU MCKENZIE

AN OSCAR FOR POLITICS

*Responses to "Political Films to Test Oscars: Will the Blue People Win," Feb. 19:*

What a dopey article. As a Black man, I found *Precious* to be highly racist and insulting. Who are the bad guys? All the Black men. Who saves Precious? Whites. I find it hilarious that you're ragging on *Avatar* for being "White Guy Dances with Natives of Color and

Saves Them" when that's *Precious* — and you obviously are not very well connected to the Black community because that is a common theme of the Black criticism of that film. *Avatar* is an antiwar movie and so is *The Hurt Locker*. I'm really amazed at all the people who keep missing that point.

—JAMES

I'm getting sick and tired of people slamming *Avatar* because the main character is a white male. It's probably the most antiwar, pro-ecology film ever made by Hollywood. What is more radical than a white man giving up the rather dubious privilege of being white? Especially when he's disabled?

—GERSAN



# NYPD Loosens Cuffs on Bloggers



**PRESSING FOR A PASS:** Online journalist Rafael Martínez-Alequín displays his old press pass badge in December 2008. He had to sue to get NYPD to issue him a new one. PHOTO: JOEL COOK

BY ALEX KANE

Internet-based journalists and bloggers are now eligible to receive press credentials from the New York Police Department.

The new guidelines announced in early March state that a journalist, including online-only media workers, applying for press credentials must show that he or she covered at least six events that the city restricted access to. Before these rules were announced, online-only journalists routinely reported being denied press credentials because they were not from an established print publication.

"This is a press credentialing system for the online age that can serve as a model for governments around the country," said Gabriel Taussig, the city's Administrative Law Division chief, in a March 1 press release.

Press credentials are vital to journalists who need to cross police lines to cover a story or to be identified as a member of the press. In addition, two new categories of press passes were announced: "reserve cards" that allow news organizations to give

reporters access to a specific assignment, and "single-event press cards" that grant credentials to journalists who pre-registered for a single event. The new categories eliminate what the city called "the chicken or the egg" problem for journalists who had not yet covered six events where there was restricted access.

"The new rules will enable journalists to gather and report news in a more successful manner than before," said Norman Siegel, a leading civil rights attorney who participated in the revision process, in the March 1 press statement. "Online journalists will now be considered as 21st century journalists and be treated equally to print, television and radio journalists."

But while online bloggers will now be able to more easily obtain credentials, NYPD will continue to issue them, something that has caused controversy in the past. Some argue that the NYPD should not be the department issuing press passes because of its involvement in contentious issues that make it a target for critical reporting, which may in turn cause the department to deny cre-

denials to journalists they deem unfriendly.

The new rules for credentialing journalists are the culmination of a process that began in November 2008, when three New York City-based journalists whose work was primarily online filed a federal lawsuit after their applications for press passes were denied. The lawsuit, led by Siegel, argued that the city's rules for issuing press credentials were unconstitutionally vague and resulted in unlawful interference with covering news.

In January 2009, the journalists who were plaintiffs in the lawsuit were awarded their previously denied press credentials.

"The media landscape is changing rapidly and New York City — with a nudge from three journalists and a team of top lawyers — grasped that fact," said David Wallis, a plaintiff in the now-settled lawsuit whose application for press credentials was denied by the NYPD in 2007.

The old guidelines caused headaches for local publications like *Gotham Gazette*, a online-only outlet read by thousands daily. *Gotham Gazette* was denied access to an October 2009 mayoral debate because they did not hold police press credentials. In a November 2008 blog post, Courtney Gross, the publication's city government editor wrote, "Since the summer of 2007, we have been denied a press identification card, which would assist us in accessing certain crowded/exclusive City Hall events. The NYPD's reason: that we are online only, sans a tangible, ink-stained print publication."

A public comment period on the new guidelines began March 2 and lasts until April 7, when a public hearing on the new rules will be held at NYPD headquarters, 1 Police Plaza, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Public comments can be submitted to NYPD Legal Bureau, 1 Police Plaza, Rm 1496, New York, NY 10038.

## PEACE WARRIOR



**TAKING A STAND:** Bill Steyert, a Vietnam War veteran and member of Veterans for Peace (VFP), braved the rain to participate in an anti-war vigil commemorating the 1,000th U.S. soldier killed in Operation Enduring Freedom Feb. 23. According to [icasualties.org](http://icasualties.org), the tally includes fatalities that occurred in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Guantanamo Bay, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Philippines, Seychelles, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Yemen. Standing in Midtown Manhattan, the group read the names of U.S. soldiers and Afghan civilians killed during the occupation. Demonstrators from VFP, the Granny Peace Brigade and Peace Action NY chanted, "Jobs not Bombs," during a march to the Armed Forces Recruiting Station in Times Square. On March 20, VFP chapters will hold events to marking the eighth year of the Iraq War.

—RENÉE FELTZ

PHOTO: AMELIA H. KRALES



## In Defense of Education

A student speaks out during a March 4 rally in defense of public education. The rally, held outside Gov. David Paterson's office at 41st Street and Third Avenue in Manhattan, drew more than 600 college and public school students and supporters. Participants later marched across Midtown to meet up with a second rally held by public school students and transit workers protesting the Metropolitan Transit Authority's plan to eliminate free fare passes for 585,000 public school students in New York City.

Both events were held on a day when hundreds of thousands of people took part in demonstrations in more than 30 states across the United States to protest deep cuts in funding for public education. In the movement's epicenter in California, actions included rallies, marches and occupations of buildings and freeways. Mass rallies were held in San Francisco and Sacramento. Students blocked the main gate to the University of California at Berkeley. In Oakland, more than 140 people were arrested and one student was seriously injured after police attacked protesters who stopped traffic on Interstate 880. California college students were recently hit with tuition hikes of 32 percent while more than 20,000 public school teachers face possible layoffs.

PHOTO: ANDREW HINDERAKER

—JOHN TARLETON

FOR CENTURIES, WOMEN HAVE TAKEN TO THE STREETS, OCCUPIED FACTORIES, BEEN CARRIED OUT OF LECTURE HALLS, BEEN BEATEN AND ARRESTED, LOBBIED AND ORGANIZED FOR INDEPENDENCE, RESPECT, EQUALITY AND JUSTICE. IN HONOR OF THE 99TH ANNIVERSARY OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY MARCH 8, *THE INDEPENDENT* HIGHLIGHTS WOMEN WHO CONTINUE THE FIGHT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE.



# Finding a Road Through the Recession

By JON GERBERG

Tucked under a discreet awning along Roosevelt Avenue in Elmhurst, Queens, Make the Road New York is nestled in a seemingly endless mall of discount groceries and gas marts. The outside of the immigrant rights group’s office is painted with a mural of the New York skyline.

Inside, the walls are draped with national flags — yellow, red, white and blue. Classrooms buzz with workshops on organizing, language, job-training and computer skills. Make the Road New York advocates for immigrants in housing, education and labor disputes, winning numerous legal and political battles over the last decade. The Independent’s Jon Gerberg sat down with Julissa Bisono, the workplace justice organizer, to discuss her organization’s work and the current political reality for immigrants living in the United States.



**JULISSA BISONO**, Make The Road New York organizer. PHOTO: ASHLEY MARINACCIO

**JON GERBERG:** What is a normal day like here at Make the Road New York?

**JULISSA BISONO:** What I do here is try to organize mostly immigrant workers in order to improve working conditions and help them recover wages. On a typical day, a person comes in who has either been working for a place for many, many years and been laid off, realized that they have not been receiving minimum wage, or has not been paid overtime. What I’ve been seeing lately is that people are working for a month or

two, being promised wages, and then never getting anything at all.

**JG:** What are some examples that really infuriated you?

**JB:** Usually the people that come in have very extreme cases. I had a worker come in yesterday who said he left his job to work for a construction company. He worked there for two months, was promised \$150 a day, and then didn’t get a penny. Now he’s getting evicted because he hasn’t been able to pay the rent.

**JG:** Over the past two years, how has the recession been a factor in the increase in workplace injustice?

**JB:** Undocumented workers don’t have the benefit of applying for unemployment insurance, so they don’t have many options. They need to find another job as soon as possible. So what I’ve seen is that they go to these employment agencies to help them find a job, and these employment agencies have become smarter about ripping off people. In the last two years I’ve had a couple of our members move back to their countries. After being here for 10 years, not seeing your family, it starts to take a toll on you. Some people are hopeless about immigration reform and just trying to survive day to day.

**JG:** With such high unemployment, why do you think people are still immigrating?

**JB:** There’s something about New York City. Back in our countries, people still talk about that “American Dream”: “I’m gonna work really hard here and I’m gonna build up and then go back to my country.” I feel like maybe 30 years ago it was more possible to actually do that, but now it’s more challenging. Jobs are not there. Wages are not there. It’s really hard to live in New York City because it’s expensive.

**JG:** You say there’s not as much racism in New York, but reports have shown that unemployment is an issue that has vastly different effects across lines of race and class.

**JB:** I feel like it’s easier to adapt here. It’s different from living in a town in the suburbs where you’re the only Hispanic family. Queens is the most diverse place in the world. In Queens, you see the diversity along the 7 train. You go to Main Street and it’s Asian. Corona is Mexican, Ecuadorian and Dominicans. And then Jackson Heights is Colombian, Bangladeshi. It’s easier when there are different types of communities.

**JG:** Sometimes there are conflicts of interest between labor and immigrants’ rights groups. What differences have you seen in your work and how do you think they can be reconciled?

**JB:** We’re all immigrants. That’s what I believe. The anti-immigrant groups have done a real good job at trying to divide us and say that immigrant workers are taking up most of the jobs. A lot of the unions say, “Wow, it’s hard for us to find jobs because the immigrant workers are taking over.”

Some unions are stuck on the fact that they want work visas, which creates a space where people are more vulnerable to exploitation. What we want as an organization is immigration reform that is going to allow families to stay together and still work and follow a path to citizenship.

**JG:** How do you propose to solve some of these problems?

**JB:** Well there’s this constant fear of immigration [police]. We need immigration reform as soon as possible. There are a lot of workers that pay their taxes here but never enjoy the benefits of a person that has [legal] status.

**JG:** What can New Yorkers do right now to start changing these injustices?

**JB:** They need to get organized. They need to get together as a group and start fighting for justice. I know it’s hard because people, especially undocumented workers, fear immigration [police]. I think that people need to start believing that if we get together there can actually be change. I don’t want to sound like Obama, but I’ve seen when workers organize themselves, the power that they have.

For more information, visit [maketheroad.org](http://maketheroad.org).

## Immigration Rally to Pressure Obama

By JON GERBERG

Tens of thousands of people are expected to converge in Washington, D.C., March 21 to remind President Barack Obama of a campaign promise to overhaul the nation’s immigration laws.

“It is time for Obama to deliver,” said Shuya Ohno, assistant communication director of the National Immigration Forum, a prominent immigrant advocacy organization.

“We are at a pivotal moment in the history of this nation,” states the Campaign to Reform Immigration for America on its website. “We can do nothing and watch as our families and communities continue to be torn apart by the broken immigration system ... Or we can stand up.”

“In his State of the Union address, I think Obama mentioned 36 words about immigration,” said Julissa Bisono, the workplace justice organizer at Make the Road New York, which is organizing some 2,000 people to travel to the capital. “It’s been a year already and immigration has been put on the back burner.”

*La Opinion* and *The LA Times* reported March 4 that Obama met with his Domestic Policy Council to discuss jumpstarting the reform effort and has pushed Sens. Charles Schumer (D-NY) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC) to take the lead on crafting legislation.

“Although this is a positive step forward, we expect the President and Congress to move beyond meetings to concrete bipartisan legislative action,” said Ali Noorani, executive director of the National Immigration Forum, in a March 5 statement.

The campaign says it has organized approximately 150 buses to bring New Yorkers to Washington for the March for America.

“Immigration is an absolute part of the American story,” Ohno said. “This is for all Americans who really care about moving this country forward.”

To join the March for America, visit [wemarchforamerica.org](http://wemarchforamerica.org).



## Face-off in Georgia

By JESSICA LEE

**WALKING THE DREAM:** Undocumented Miami-Dade College music therapy student Gaby Pacheco is walking from Florida to D.C. in the “Trail of Dreams” to advocate immigration reform as her family faces deportation proceedings. PHOTO: TRAILOFDREAMS.ORG.

Four immigrant students walked into Gwinnett County Courthouse in Lawrenceville, Ga., wearing shirts reading “undocumented” on March 3 and asked to speak with Sheriff R.L. “Butch” Conway about the broken U.S. immigration system.

The students — Felipe Matos, Gaby Pacheco, Carlos Roa and Juan Rodriguez — are walking 1,500 miles from Miami to Washington, D.C., in a five-month campaign named “Trail of Dreams” to raise attention about the conditions of immigrants and to pressure President Barack Obama and Congress to take up comprehensive immigration reform, including providing greater access for undocumented students to education.

“We’re coming out of the shadows,” Pacheco, 25, told *The Independent* in January. “Here we are, the undocumented youth that have so much potential and so much desire to make this a better country.” The students had tried to schedule a meeting with the sheriff ahead of time, but had not been successful, so they dropped in. If the students had been arrested, three of them could have faced deportation. Rodriguez is the only legal resident.

Conway has been a vocal proponent of “287(g),” a federal provision authorizing local law enforcement to enforce federal immigration laws. The Trail of Dreams says that this policy has resulted in the deportation of hundreds of immigrants from Gwinnett County in just the past three months — which the student walkers say is oppressive and discriminatory.

“We’re not scared of Sheriff Conway,” said Rodriguez, 20, in a March 2 press statement. “Local enforcement of federal policies like the one Sheriff Conway is proudly implementing is proof of the need for real immigration reform. These policies have the long-term effect of criminalizing immigrants — the vast majority of whom are here only to work hard and provide for their families.”

For more information about the Trail of Dreams, visit [trail2010.org](http://trail2010.org).



# Haitian Students Find Local Safety Net

By JAISAL NOOR

**W**orried about Haitian young adults slipping through the cracks in New York City, Brooklyn community activist Darnell Benoit co-founded Flanbwayan, The Haitian Literacy Project, in 2005. Benoit currently serves as the director of the Flatbush-based educational and advocacy nonprofit, serving the needs of local Haitian youth. *The Independent* caught Benoit for a moment in her office before she left for a two-week mission to Haiti organized by the group Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees.

**JAISAL NOOR:** How did you get involved in Flanbwayan and Haitian immigrant education advocacy?

**DARNELL BENOIT:** For 15 years, I worked as an English as a Second Language teacher in adult education programs. Back then, I noticed a lot of young people, 17, 18 years old, were coming to those programs. When I started speaking with them, I realized that they should be in high school instead of in an adult program. I decided to focus on Haitian immigrants because, in doing the research, I found it was a huge problem in the community. Even today there is not an organization like Flanbwayan working on education needs for new immigrants. We also collaborate with other immigrant organizations.

For our community, focusing on education is very important because many parents are working, and a lot do not speak English. We work not only to help students get access to education, but to advocate for better programs. In the public education system when, as a new immigrant, you enter at an early age, things are okay. Even if you have difficulty learning English, you have time [to learn it]. But the problems starts for immigrant students who enter directly into high school. That's why we just focus on students

age 14 to 21, with a very special focus on older students, whom the city calls "overage."

**JN:** What are some of the typical challenges that these students are faced with?

**DB:** Our community used to have six thriving bilingual programs, they no longer exist, because the city has phased them out. The DOE [Department of Education] insists that there are still two, but they don't exist. That's one option our students don't have that other communities have. For Haitian students, many enter behind in school. This means you might be 17, but educationally you are not like an 11th grader. A 17-year-old student might have just completed eighth grade. Flanbwayan is here for students who are marginalized, for students falling through the cracks, because they are the most challenging. They are the hardest to educate. But everyone deserves a quality education, so some of the issues that we have are students with low or no literacy. The DOE initiated a program called SIFE [Students with Interrupted Formal Education]. It's a great initiative, but it's not available in our community.

**JN:** In 2006, the Department of Education announced plans to "phase down" Samuel J.



**EDUCATION ADVOCATE:** Flanbwayan director Darnell Benoit in her office in Flatbush, Brooklyn  
**PHOTO:** Jaisal Noor

*Tilden High School, which provides English as a Second Language services for Haitian students, and the school is closing this June. What effect will this have on these students?*

**DB:** Tilden is a big high school and has been serving Haitian kids for ages. I didn't grow up in Brooklyn, but most of my friends who grew up in Brooklyn went to Tilden. The high school had a vital bilingual program, but in recent years the school was "failing," and the DOE decided to close the school. There will be 40 to 50 students at Tilden in June who will not graduate. What people don't realize is that when a school closes, it doesn't mean all the students get a high school diploma. It means the students have to fend for themselves. The DOE doesn't have a plan for them.

**JN:** How has the earthquake in Haiti affected the work that your organization does and the students you work with?

**DB:** We're just happy we're here to welcome students coming in after the earthquake. For students [coming in from Haiti], Jan. 12 is the last time they have been in school. Returning to school is the one thing that helps bring normalcy back to their lives, because that's what is going to help them with the trauma they have been through. We're able to help them meet other young people, so that they can start building their lives here and start picking up where they left off.

For more information visit [flanbwayan.org](http://flanbwayan.org).

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# HOPE FOR HAITI

## Trained in Cuba, Bronx doctor Melissa Barber drops everything to help earthquake victims



**BABY LOVE:** Doctors look after a Haitian baby during a day of children's activities designed to assess symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. PHOTO: IFCO.

BY RENÉE FELTZ

After the Jan. 12 earthquake that devastated Haiti, Dr. Melissa Barber received a call asking her to help treat people left injured and living in squalid conditions.

"There was no question," said Barber, 30, who was born and raised in the Bronx and worked in quality assessment at St. Barnabas Hospital in the heart of the borough. "I actually resigned and I made plans to go to Haiti for a month. That is how much it's ingrained in me to help the underserved communities when they are in need."

Barber's sense of service stems from her training at the Latin American School of Medicine in Havana, Cuba (See sidebar). Like thousands of fellow graduates from poor and indigenous communities in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa, she received a full scholarship to attend the school in exchange for a commitment to work in areas that lack adequate access to healthcare. Haiti no doubt fit that definition before the earthquake, and even more so afterward.

So Barber joined six other Cuban-trained doctors from the United States — all of them women — who packed their bags full of donated medical supplies and arrived Jan. 26 in the Dominican Republic, beginning a

commitment that could last for years.

### ON THE GROUND IN HAITI

On the bus ride into Haiti, the physicians from New York City, Houston and Oakland got a crash course in Creole from their Haitian-American colleague, Dr. Martine Pierre. She taught them useful phrases like, "What's your name?" and "What's wrong with you?" For the next month the doctors would use these phrases while treating hundreds of patients a day.

Their home base was a clinic in Croix des Bouquets, a suburb of Port-au-Prince that lies eight miles northeast of the ruined capital. Cuban doctors working in Haiti before the quake set up the makeshift hospital a week before they arrived, and already word had spread to longtime residents and newly arrived refugees living nearby in tent villages.

"The line to see us would start at four in the morning," Barber said. "Once they realized there is free medical care and medicine, they were like 'Oh my god, I can finally see a doctor.'"

Many of the patients treated at the clinic had never seen a doctor before. In addition to receiving treatment for quake-related injuries and water-borne diseases, they sought help for chronic conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure. The doctors relied on their Cuban-training that focused on primary care medicine, as well as two years of training in disaster relief.

But nothing could prepare Barber for ex-

periences like treating a 4-year-old boy who was brought in by his mother in a state of severe dehydration. Within 10 minutes of his arrival he died. The mother said she had left her son to search for his father when he went missing after the earthquake. By the time she returned home he had been suffering from diarrhea for four days.

"That kind of stuff is so preventable," Barber said. "It speaks of a lack of health-care that they need."

### INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Barber and her fellow physicians from the United States inspired the *Comandante* himself, Fidel Castro, to send an invitation to all of the school's graduates to volunteer in Haiti. By February, more than 250 alumni from 25 countries responded. They came from Bolivia, Mali, Lebanon and Nigeria — among other nations. About 300 Haitians in their final two years of medical school returned home as well.

For the first time ever, an international contingent of Cuban-trained doctors joined the 230 Cuban members of the Henry Reeve Emergency Medical Brigade, which specializes in disaster response. Many of them had provided medical support after recent earthquakes in Pakistan and China.

All of these volunteers bolstered the contingent of about 350 Cuban doctors who were in Haiti before the earthquake. Cuba initiated a medical cooperation agreement in 1998 to meet the primary care needs of

the impoverished nation.

"We were working closely with the Cuban mission that was already in Port-au-Prince," recalled Dr. Elsie Watler, another member of the U.S. medical delegation from New York. "We were able to cooperate with them since they were there from the beginning."

According to reports from the Cuban news service, *Prensa Latina*, there are now more than 1,000 Cuban and Cuban-trained medical workers in Haiti. But their presence has received scant coverage in the U.S. mainstream press.

While Doctors Without Borders (*Médecins Sans Frontières*) sent around 300 health professionals and appeared in countless media reports with groups like the Red Cross, mentions of the Cuban teams were limited to Cuban and Venezuelan outlets.

Bruce Calder, a professor emeritus of Latin American history at University of Illinois at Chicago, watched the mainstream coverage and noted that volunteers from almost every country but Cuba were getting recognized: "I even heard New Zealanders interviewed today!"

### AFTER THE EMERGENCY

Medical personnel from many international NGOs began to pull out of Haiti once immediate rescue and emergency needs were met. But the Cuban-trained doctors kept working more than a month after the disaster.

They split up into teams of 50 and fanned out to work at field hospitals and open-air clinics sent up in Port-au-Prince, Leogane, Grande Goave and Arcahaie, often visiting previously ignored tent villages full of thousands of people.

"You would see people living not in tents, but structures made out of tree branches and sheets," Barber said. "That's where the levels of rodents, mosquitoes, flies and just horrible living conditions was most prominent."

At these sprawling camps the doctors carried out a massive vaccination campaign against highly contagious diseases like typhoid fever, whooping cough and diphtheria.

"Post-quake epidemics are a real concern of course," said Croix des Bouquets clinic director Dr. Carlos Alberto Garcia in an interview with Medical Education Cooperation with Cuba, a nonprofit organization working within Cuba and the United States.

By mid-February, doctors treated 14,197 patients in Croix des Bouquets, along with 5,920 patients at annex sites. Their colleagues throughout the other sites treated an additional 50,000 people. They performed more than 5,000 surgeries and attended at least 300 births, according to the Cuban government.

"The responsibility that was placed on our shoulders was tremendous," said Dr.

**MAKESHIFT MEDICINE:** Cuban-trained doctors treat an earthquake survivor at a clinic in Croix des Bouquets. Photo: IFCO



The Inter-religious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO) is collaborating with Transit Workers Union Local 100 to organize a container shipment of these medical supplies, tents and cots to Haiti. IFCO also administers the scholarship program for U.S. students to attend the Latin American School of Medicine. Contact them to drop off supplies, make a tax-deductible donation or apply for the scholarship program: 212-926-5757, 418 W 145th Street, New York, NY 10031. ifco.igc.org

### MEDICAL SUPPLIES NEEDED BY CUBAN-TRAINED DOCTORS IN HAITI:

- ☐ Scrubs & Sutures
- ☐ Surgical Gloves & Masks
- ☐ Ultrasound Gel
- ☐ Anesthesia
- ☐ HIV Rapid Tests
- ☐ Glucose Meters with Testing Strips
- ☐ Fetal Heart Monitors





**THE U.S. DELEGATION:** Cuban-trained U.S. doctors serving in Haiti: (back row left to right) Martine Pierre, Keyshia Covington, Melissa Barber; (front row left to right) Elsie Watler, Melissa Mitchell, Wing Wu, Nyla Manning. PHOTO: IFCO.

Melissa Mitchell, a member of the Cuban-trained U.S. delegation. “Some of us were delivering babies alone for the first time ever. The first time that happened it was a very emotional experience, but then it became normal.”

#### HOLISTIC HEALING

In addition to dealing with primary care and treating disease, the Cubans expanded their focus to address the need for physical and psychological rehabilitation.

Physical therapy programs have been set up at several clinics to assist those with injuries or amputations. Specialists are also available to treat post-traumatic stress disorder among survivors.

At the field hospital in Croix des Bouquets, which occupies what had formerly been a playground, physicians worked to reduce psychological damage suffered by children. With help from parents in the community they put together a children’s festival that included watercolor painting, singing, and sports.

Now, the children’s gathering has become a weekly event. “Every Thursday they would gather all the kids in the community together to do activities,” Barber said.

Volunteers translated several children’s books from Spanish into Creole, and sent the translations to Cuba, which sent back copies to use for storytelling. *Prensa Latina* reports plans are underway to introduce the children’s festivals in other devastated areas, “permitting children to put their nightmares off to one side, at least for a while.”

Dr. Cristóbal Martínez told *Prensa Latina* that, “Although there had been a terrible disaster, if children eat, play and can enjoy themselves, in their consciousness the disaster has already passed.”

The doctors who took a break from their work to paint and play games with the children said they also benefited from the mental break.

#### CREATING A HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

“It was difficult for us to leave because our

presence is still needed,” said Mitchell, who joined the seven-member U.S. delegation after they returned in early March during a press conference at the New York City headquarters of Transit Workers Union Local 100.

“It’s not about just being there for the crisis. We need to be there for the long term,” she said. “We need to be able to help establish some type of medical system.”

In fact, the makeshift clinics where the doctors worked are essentially pilot projects for long-term healthcare centers. They will expand upon the hospitals Cuba established prior to the earthquake.

Several hundred recent graduates from the Latin American School of Public Health are staffing the hospitals until Haitian students finish their training and replace them. Many of the graduates committed to stay in Haiti for a year or more. In return, they will receive two more years of free medical training in the specialized field of their choice.

Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo Hernández said his country’s commitment to Haiti “has to be at that level, above all in something as significant as the population’s health.”

Many of the women in the U.S. delegation expressed a desire to return to Haiti when their schedules permit.

Dr. Martine Pierre spoke with one of the doctors back at the clinic in Croix des Bouquets the day after the delegation left. He said the patients they had treated for chronic diseases came looking for the U.S. doctors and were sad to find they were gone. “That really hurt their feelings,” Pierre said. “But the Haitian doctors told them we will soon be back.”

For now, Barber is back in the Bronx focusing on studying for exams that she hopes will get her into a residency program for Obstetrics and Gynecology. But her mind is still on Haiti.

“The treatment needs to be continuous,” Barber said. “Because we’ve only put a dent in what is needed for the population.”

## CUBA: A MEDICAL SUPERPOWER

By JOHN TARLETON

For many in the United States, Cuba conjures up images of cigars and its bearded leader Fidel Castro. But for poor people in dozens of countries around the world, Cuba has become a lifeline.

Some 30,000 Cuban doctors currently serve in 70 countries as a part of the island nation’s program of South-to-South assistance. Emphasizing primary and preventative care, these doctors operate in urban shantytowns and remote rural areas that private medical practitioners are unable or unwilling to reach.

Cuba is also training a new generation of “people’s doctors:” more than 24,000 foreign medical students are studying for free in Havana at the

Latin American School of Medicine (or ELAM, Escuela Latinoamericana de Medicina). Most students are from Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa but more than 100 are from the United States. Preference is given to students from modest backgrounds who otherwise would not have been able to attend medical school. After finishing their six-year program at ELAM, the school’s graduates promise to return to their home countries to serve underserved communities.

Worldwide, Cuba’s medical educators have helped establish 11 medical schools and two nursing schools for in-country training of health professionals for local public health systems.

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# LIVING POSITIVE

PHOTO ESSAY BY AMELIA H. KRALES

ELDA MALPERA IS PROUD OF HOW far she has come. A resident of East New York, Brooklyn, Malpera, 39, a mother of four, has overcome two decades spent in the grip of addiction, time in prison and a rape that left her HIV-positive. Sitting tall with a steady gaze, her accomplishments in the last year — with the support of New York City human services programs — have made her stronger, healthier. “Women and HIV. Once upon a time, those two words were seldom found in a sentence together,” writes Laura Whitehorn in the March issue of *POZ Magazine*, the leading publication that focuses on the disease. “Lack of self-esteem, few resources, gender power imbalances, legal and political limitations, societal misperceptions and even basic biology have contributed to the fact that HIV/AIDS is now the No. 1 cause of disease and death among women ages 15 to 44 worldwide.” Malpera, one of the more than 22,000 women in New York State who live with the virus, is not just a statistic. The National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day on March 10 aims to make women like Malpera visible.



Elda Malpera was diagnosed with HIV a decade ago while serving a sentence at the city prison on Rikers Island for trying to sell drugs to an undercover police officer. She speaks honestly about the years abusing crack cocaine and alcohol. After the world fell from beneath her feet, she found solid ground at Housing Works, a nonprofit organization that has offered community-based care to New Yorkers with HIV/AIDS for nearly 20 years. Accepted into the Women’s Transitional Housing (WTH) Program after being released from prison two years ago, she received healthcare, counseling, housing services, educational programs and job training. WTH gives women up to two years of support to find independent housing. Currently, her rent is partially subsidized by the New York City HIV/AIDS Service Administration (HASA), which pays \$1,117 of her \$1,400 monthly rent for her two-bedroom apartment. She is one of the 45,000 people in the city with HIV/AIDS and their families who receive HASA services. She plans to get off the HASA subsidy when she gets a job. Her husband, Anthony and their 6-year-old daughter, Rachel, are both HIV-negative.

22,532: Women and girls in New York State with HIV/AIDS in 2007 • 105,000: New York City residents who are HIV-positive



Malpera’s past and present share the same shelf. A photo of her as a child with her mother, Margarita, rests next to her HIV medication. To keep healthy, she must take two pills twice a day, which she guesses could cost up to \$800 a month for each prescription. Medicaid covers these expenses, along with her weekly osteoporosis pill and daily injection for wasting syndrome, a painful loss of muscle tissue caused by the virus. She adheres strictly to her medication regimen and has been keeping her immune system strong and her T-cell count high.

21%: The percentage of people in the United States who are infected with HIV and do not know it

“My relationship with my father, was, he was my drinking buddy,” Malpera says. Her father, Sergio, shown here in February 2009, when he was in the final states of cirrhosis of the liver, the consequence of life-long drinking. Although she had been sober for two years, she says, “Seeing [what happened to] him instilled in me never to drink again.” Immediately after being released from prison, Malpera began caring for her father who died a week after this photo was taken.



Celebrating on her wedding day Sept. 28, Malpera shares the moment with her mother, Margarita (left) and husband, Anthony Gonzalez (right), on the front stoop of her home. “Anthony keeps me stronger,” Malpera says of her partner of 11 years. Her eldest child, Stephanie, 18, plays with Rachel on the sidewalk. Stephanie had been in foster care since she was seven years old and reconnected with Malpera last year.

66%: African American women account for two-thirds of estimated AIDS cases among women in the United States, ages 13 and older, diagnosed in 2007

12%: The percentage of women in the United States who are African American, in 2007

35: Number of minutes that passes before another woman tests positive for HIV in the United States



“I want Rachel to go to the best school, and I know she can go to college,” says Malpera, who often helps her daughter with her homework. In February, she reconnected with her middle daughter, 13, whom she hadn’t seen in 11 years. She has not seen her son since he was five. Like many women with HIV, she faces the double challenge of caring for her family and herself.



Anthony and Malpera share a personal moment in their backyard the morning of their wedding. Elda is hopeful and happy about the new path she is forging. Recently, she received a full scholarship for an 11-month job training program at the Outreach Training Institute in Greenpoint, Brooklyn to become a counselor for teens facing HIV/AIDS and drug addiction issues — a long-standing goal of hers. Challenges remain, however. She currently does not have a job and Anthony was laid off from his job as an Access-a-Ride driver, and was recently diagnosed with Bell’s Palsy. Elda is glad she was able to utilize HASA services, which are being threatened with the city’s funding squeeze. Mayor Bloomberg has proposed cutting nearly \$17 million from HASA’s budget, which advocates say could make it more difficult for low-income New York City residents with HIV/AIDS to access healthcare, housing, nutrition counselling and other social services. Housing Works is organizing a campaign to oppose the cuts and held a rally March 8 at City Hall before the City Council held a hearing on the fiscal year 2011 budget.

15%: Latina account for 15 percent of estimated AIDS cases among women and make up 13 percent of the total female population, ages 13 and older, in 2007



Malpera runs up the stairs of the Seneca Station of the M train with her daughter, Rachel, in Ridgewood, Queens.

## NEW YORK CITY HIV/AIDS RESOURCES:

**SMART University:** smartuniversity.org • 212-564-3282  
**Iris House:** irishouse.org • 646-548-0100  
**AIDS Resource Center:** ascnyc.org • 212-448-5154  
**Housing Works:** housingworks.org • 347-473-7400  
**Gay Mens Health Crisis:** gmhc.org • 212-367-1000 or 800-243-7692  
**Ryan-Nena Community Health Center:** ryancenter.org 212-477-8500

## INFORMATION:

**POZ Magazine:** poz.com  
**NYC Dept. of Health:** nyc.gov  
**U.N. Programme on HIV/AIDS:** unaids.org


(Sources: Housing Works, Kaiser Foundation and Office on Women’s Health/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)



**21ST CENTURY LAND GRAB**  
Ethiopia and at least 19 other African nations have sold off or leased more than 120 million acres of agricultural land to wealthy nations, investment firms and agribusiness firms, in what the British newspaper, *The Observer*, recently described as a “21st century land grab.” Since 2007, the Ethiopian government has approved 815 foreign-financed agricultural projects. Much of the land is being used to grow biofuels or crops for export. This comes at a time when 13 million Ethiopians require food aid. “The biofuel land grab in Africa is already displacing farmers and food production,” said Tim Rice of ActionAid. “The number of people going hungry will increase.” Investors have also purchased land in Sudan, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi, Congo, Zambia, Uganda, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Mali, Sierra Leone and Ghana.

**CLUSTER BOMB BAN MOVES FORWARD WITHOUT UNITED STATES**  
An international agreement to ban cluster bombs is set to become international law in August after Burkina Faso and Moldova became the 29th and 30th nations to ratify the treaty. Cluster bombs are packed with bomblets that spread out over a large area and often don’t explode on first impact. These live munitions have caused thousands of civilian casualties around the world. The United States, one of the main users of cluster bombs, has refused to sign the treaty. So have China, India, Pakistan, Israel and Russia. The agreement requires countries that used cluster munitions in the past to provide support for affected communities and to assist in clearing contaminated land.

**100 PERCENT RENEWABLE ENERGY IN AUSTRALIA?**



A new report claims Australia can use solar and wind power to produce 100 percent of its electricity in 10 years by using currently available technologies. The report by the group, Beyond Zero Emissions, says no new nuclear power is needed to displace conventional fossil fuels. “The reason people put their finger on the nuclear option is because they felt there was no other option. That’s not the case today.” The report calls for 40 percent of power to come from wind turbines. Concentrating solar power plants, with molten salt to store energy that powers turbines, would form the backbone of the system, providing 60 percent of total electricity. The findings comes as nuclear power advocates worldwide are pushing for construction of new facilities to replace coal plants and slow down climate change. The United States just guaranteed over \$8 billion in loans for the first two new nuclear plants in the nation in over 30 years.

**ESCAPE FROM JUSTICE?**  
Chevron is trying to abandon an environmental case in Ecuador where it faces damages of up to \$27 billion for allegedly poisoning an area the size of Rhode Island. Chevron first fought to move the case from the United States to Ecuador, but then balked as evidence mounted that it dumped billions of gallons of toxic wastewater from oil extraction into rivers and unlined waste pits in the rainforest area. In 2008, a Special Master appointed by the Ecuador court found the pollution had caused 1,401 excess cancer deaths and decimated indigenous groups. As *The Independent* went to press, Chevron was in a U.S. federal court in New York City to request the judge handle the case in a closed-door arbitration, without input from the rainforest community members.

# PARTICIPATORY RADIO: LESSONS FROM THE RADICAL SOUTH

BY ANDALUSIA KNOLL

People across Latin America and the United States are increasingly turning to community media as a tool of resistance. Examples include women in Oaxaca, Mexico, who led a take-over of corporate and state media outlets amid their media blackout of a popular rebellion, and the Coalition of Immokalee workers station Radio Conciencia that broadcasts details about farm workers’ rights to migrant laborers in Florida.

Maka Muñoz, a Latin American radio activist and co-founder of Palabra Radio, plans to use these examples in a cross-country tour to grow Spanish language, participatory radio in immigrant communities in the United States. Muñoz discussed her philosophy with Andalusia Knoll, an organizer with the Prometheus Radio Project who will join her on tour.

**ANDALUSIA KNOLL:** *Normally people in the United States try to export their models of “development” to the “developing world.” It seems that with Palabra Radio, you are attempting to import organizing models to the United States. What do you think we have to learn from community radio in the Global South?*

**MAKA MUÑOZ:** It’s a good question, because it is so common in Latin America, and really all around the world, for things to come from the North to the South. Here, in the U.S. we are promoting methods of organizing, sharing experiences and specific values. These values include a focus on solidarity, cooperation and working together for a common good which are increasingly important to promote as we are in the middle of a neoliberal crisis.

We recognize that these values aren’t exclusively from the South, as the beliefs of many indigenous groups in the North are similar. Nevertheless, we believe that many of these values, and ways of organizing ourselves, have been displaced by other values imposed by a much more powerful system of consumerism and competition with its own mass media infrastructure. Right now, this system is in a grave crisis that affects us all. In order to confront the multiple barriers and problems inherent in it, we are more interested in creating a model that fits with the context and reality here as immigrants rather than importing one.

**AK:** *Can you give us some political context for your work in both in Chile and in southern Mexico? What are the issues that people are facing and how are they organizing and what role does radio play?*

**MM:** In South America in the 1970s, people lived under the rule of dictatorship and then in the 1980s, experienced a transition to a neoliberal system. For example, right now Chile has a stable economy, but this is because during the Pinochet dictatorship he created a constitution that focused on protecting private capital. This model has left many people without access to housing, healthcare, food, education and so on. Media appears as a new right that allows poor and marginalized people to grow community and fight for these basic rights.

In Mexico, there are many indigenous people who are denied rights in the formal economy, but they have natural resources, which the government wants to exploit. The people need to organize against these private transnational companies and use media in these struggles, as well as conserve their languages, cultures and traditions.

**AK:** *How, more specifically, does media help people in their struggles?*

**MM:** People need tools to help them organize themselves. Media is just that, a medium, a tool that allows organized people to amplify

their message, interact and promote the use of traditional languages, cultures, traditional knowledge and the value of natural resources. Radio allows people to participate, put their voices on the air and share their different experiences on the air.

**AK:** *In the United States, many people are critical of the corporate media and its demonization of immigrants, poor people, people of color, women, etc. What is the corporate media like there?*

**MM:** It’s the same. In the case of Chile, 70 percent of the spectrum is controlled by a Spanish company, completely foreign, and licensed community radio is not accessible because all the criteria to give out licenses are technical and do not take into consideration social factors, or content. In Mexico, Televisa controls all the radio and newspapers and the people know that there is not a place for them in those media outlets, so they have to create their own media.

**AK:** *What are some of the risks people face operating radio stations in Mexico and Chile?*



**RADIO TRAINING:** Community Radio activist Maka Muñoz works with girls at a radio station in an indigenous village in Oaxaca, Mexico. PHOTO: PALABRA RADIO

**MM:** In Mexico, politicians want to criminalize community broadcasting. They say that community radio works for guerrilla groups or for narco-traffickers. But at the same time they are saying the problem is that community radio stations use the spectrum but don’t pay for it. They say the spectrum is private but we believe the air is free, so it is absurd to criminalize people for broadcasting. Under the law they are currently trying to pass, you could go to jail for 12 years if you “sell, install or operate unlicensed community radio equipment.” In Chile, there are people that are on trial who could face a

three year jail sentence for transmitting radio without a license.

**AK:** *Why does Palabra Radio promote the usage of open source software and hardware?*

**MM:** We are promoting another world, and in that world, there is a free exchange of knowledge. The idea is to create sustainable projects in the long term. If we use commercial radio equipment, we will be dependent on the store we buy it from. If we use open

*Follow the tour and learn more at [palabraradio.org](http://palabraradio.org) and [prometheusradio.org](http://prometheusradio.org).*



# 'Not Our Kind'

BY LORETTA J. ROSS

Recent mainstream media coverage of a new anti-abortion campaign aimed Black audiences neglected to mention a leading expert on the topic. Many of the billboards erected by the largely white group, Georgia Right to Life, were in the backyard of Loretta J. Ross, who is the national coordinator of SisterSong, Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, headquartered in Atlanta. She was National Co-Director of the 2004 March for Women's Lives in Washington D.C., the largest protest march in history.

Below is an excerpt of an article by Ross titled "Re-Enslaving African American Women," which appeared in the Fall 2008 edition of *On The Issues* magazine.

The Black anti-abortion movement needs to be taken seriously. The people involved in it carefully exploit religious values to make inroads into our communities. They poison the soil in which we must toil ...

## OPPOSITION RESEARCH NEEDED

Who are these people in the Black anti-abortion movement? This movement needs to be carefully studied through opposition research. Information on them, their connections to white anti-abortion groups and their sources of funding is scant.

Of course, the most famous of the Black anti-abortionists is Alveda King, niece of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She is a pastoral associate, a member of the avid anti-abortion group Priests for Life, and director of African American Outreach for the Gospel of Life Ministries. Because her father was Dr. King's brother, Alveda is the leading voice for linking the anti-abortionists to the Civil Rights movement. This is despite the fact that both Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott King were strong supporters of family planning in general, and Planned Parenthood in particular. Alveda King, who lives in Atlanta, has also spoken out strongly against gay rights and in support of charter schools.

A widely known Black anti-abortion minister is Rev. Clenard H. Childress of New Jersey, founder of the BlackGenocide.org project and website. He is the president of the Northeast Chapter of Life Education and Resource Network (L.E.A.R.N.), established in 1993. He claims that the "high rate of abortion has decimated the Black family and destroyed Black neighborhoods to the detriment of society at large." He led protests at the 2008 NAACP convention in Cincinnati and has accused the organization of practicing racism against Black children. He is also on the board of the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform, which circulates the Genocide Awareness Project.

Alan Keyes, perennial presidential candidate, is also well known in anti-abortion circles. Keyes first came to national attention when President Reagan appointed him as adviser to Maureen Reagan (daughter of the president), as she led the official U.S. delegation to the U.N. World Conference for Women in Kenya in 1985. At this meeting, the United States affirmed its support for the infamous 1984 "Mexico City" policy that banned U.S. funds from supporting abortion worldwide. Keyes helped lead the anti-abortion protests at the 2008 Democratic National Convention in Denver and is a favorite of the right for his extreme views on a



LISA LIN

number of issues.

There are a handful of other Black spokespeople for the anti-abortion movement. The point is not how many there are, but the disproportionate impact they have. They have created the false impression that if only Black people were warned that abortion is genocide, women would stop having them in order to preserve the Black race, either voluntarily or by being pressured by the men in their lives.

## THE SEXISM THEY SELL

The sexism in their viewpoints is mind-boggling. To them, Black women are the poor dupes of the abortion rights movement, lacking agency and decision-making of our own. In fact, this is a reassertion of Black male supremacy over the self-determination of women. It doesn't matter whether it is from the lips of a man or a woman. It is about re-enslaving Black women by making us breeders for someone else's cause.

We need our leading African American women's and Civil Rights organizations to speak out more strongly in support of reproductive justice. We need to organize young people to resist the misinformation directed at them by these groups. Many of our campuses are unaware of the activities of the Black anti-abortionists until they show up, usually invited by a white anti-abortion group.

But mostly, we need to let the world know that they do not speak for Black women. As my mother would say, "they might be our color, but they are not our kind."

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# Dreaming of the Netroots

*Beyond the Echo Chamber: Reshaping Politics Through Progressive Media*  
BY JESSICA CLARK AND  
TRACY VAN SLYKE  
THE NEW PRESS, 2010

It's mind-boggling that a decade ago the progressive blogosphere barely existed. The Daily Kos is just eight years old, FireDogLake and Feministing six. Similarly stunning, such staples as The Huffington Post, Talking Points Memo, and Color of Change came into our lives a mere five years ago.

Indeed, the internet seems to be continually exploding, giving thousands of progressive bloggers, videographers and photographers an outlet. Throughout the country — and in much of the world — an array of personalities regularly share their insights and complaints. It's made this a heady time for journalism, moving it from a profession requiring formal credentials to one in which those with access to a keyboard or digital camera can present ideas and spar with friends, acquaintances and strangers.

This development has already had a discernible impact on the body politic and Jessica Clark and Tracy Van Slyke's *Beyond the Echo Chamber* enthusiastically trumpets the rise in "citizen journalism." The book further celebrates the information sharing that has resulted from the internet's nearly ubiquitous presence.

Take the case of the Jena Six, a group of African-American high school students arrested in the fall of 2006 for attempted murder and conspiracy, charges that might have led to decades in prison. According to Clark and Van Slyke, in May 2007 *Left Turn* magazine ran an article about the Louisiana case, highlighting the overt racism the men had experienced

from white classmates. A Baptist preacher-cum-community activist, Alan Bean, saw the article, investigated, and sent a packet of materials to a Black *Chicago Tribune* reporter. The reporter blogged about the arrests and then emailed his work to a handful of others. The story quickly went viral and in short order a campaign to reduce the charges against the young men was underway. "While the Black blogosphere coalesced, the bloggers united around not only the unjust sentencing of the Jena Six, but also what they criticized as a lack of consistent attention by the 'white' media to the unfolding events in Jena," Clark and Van Slyke report. "When the mainstream media did finally pay attention, specifically in the lead-up to the Sept. 20 march, you could find AP [Associated Press] and major newspapers in Jena." The six were ultimately convicted of battery, a clear victory for both the arrested teens and the organizers. By using the internet to publicize conditions in this rural backwater, they successfully mobilized nationwide outrage against blatant racial discrimination in the small southern town.

Yet for all this, Clark and Van Slyke note that most white bloggers paid little to no attention to the case, raising the question of whether the internet replicates the racial, class and gender stratification of society itself. While the jury remains out on this, Clark and Van Slyke are optimistic that democracy, cooperation and equity will ultimately be enhanced by the vast array of information available online.

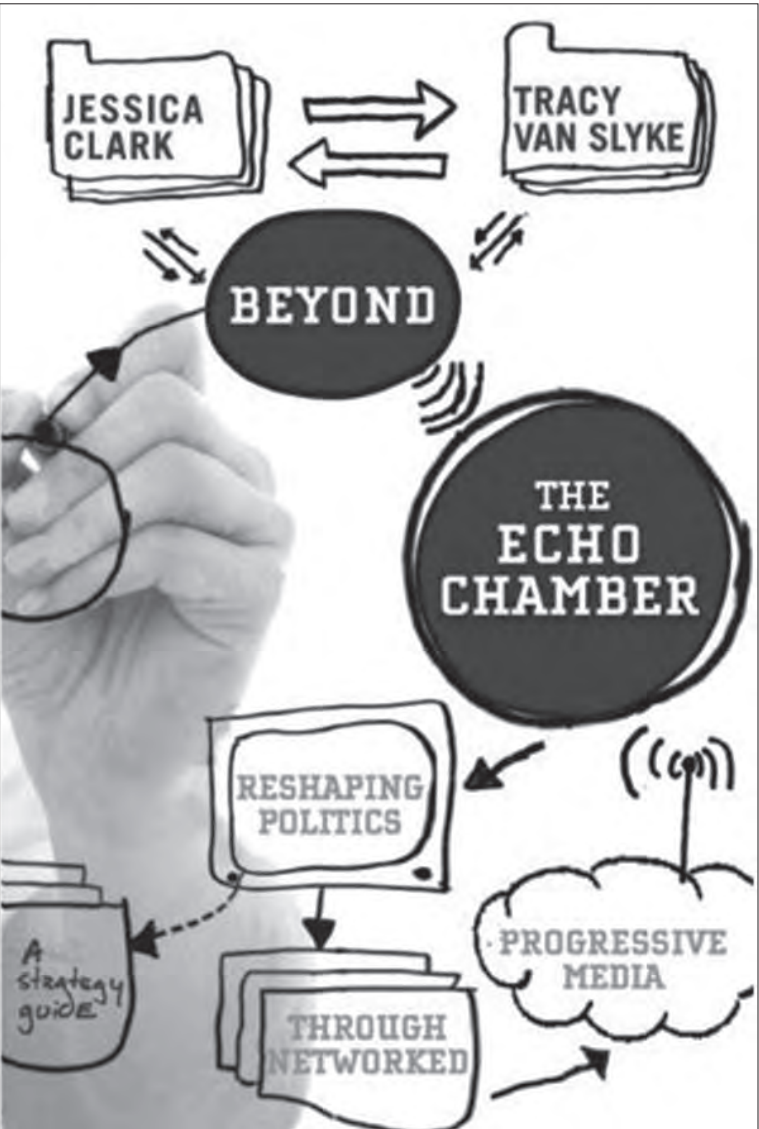
I'm not so sure. In fact, I fear that somewhere down the line, once the novelty of unpaid blogging wears off, those writers and organizations that are best able to attract advertising dollars — the most polished journalists, best

filmmakers and most articulate debaters — will knock those with smaller followings and lesser skills off the playing field.

What's more, I share the authors' concern about journalistic integrity and wonder how best to hold websites and blogs accountable for the factual information they present. It comes down to making sure that good, old-fashioned investigative reporting is done with the same rigor online, as it is when writing is submitted to print publications. Good reporting is already evident on sites including FireDogLake, AlterNet, Truthout, rhrealitycheck, The Huffington Post and FiveThirtyEight.com, but since it is possible for pretty much anyone to create a webpage, many postings leave a lot to be desired. To be clear, I'm not advocating the illusion of unbiased reporting or the denial of perspective — reporting can and should highlight racial, class, and gender bias and showcase bad foreign and domestic policy — but at the same time, it needs to eschew rhetoric and deliver well-supported data to buttress claims and allegations.

My concern is this: hard-hitting gumshoe reporting takes a good deal of money, money to support research and train and pay reporters, photographers, and videographers. Sadly, if this cash comes from the same advertisers that now dominate mainstream media, there's no reason to think that blogs or websites will be any better at offering progressive alternatives than their predecessors.

So, can the Internet be a boon to democracy and progressive movements? Absolutely. But let's not forget that this is neither a given nor a guarantee. While we're at it, let's not forget that the Right also has computers and, as the Tea Party movement has made clear, conservative media hounds and activists are adept at using them.



Knowing how to use the media is essential for achieving social change. Ultimately, however, a tool is just a tool. From my perch, campaigns for justice always require capital, both human and green, to catch fire. And while broadsheets, blogs, vlogs and websites are essential components of such efforts, nothing can replace the human-to-human connection of grassroots organizing to compel civic engagement. At the end of the day, technology can enhance, but not replace, on-the-ground outreach.

Clark and Van Slyke believe that networked media can reshape progressive politics. I hope they're right. Some positive indicators are evident: First, an online campaign

forced the David and Goliath Company to stop advertising a t-shirt with the slogan, "No Means No Unless I'm Drunk;" Secondly, Feministing pushed *Time* magazine to print a retraction after describing Plan B emergency contraception as "abortion inducing."

Still, despite exciting possibilities for online activism, the United States is currently experiencing a virulent right-wing escalation and it is obvious that media can push politics from both left and right. *Beyond the Echo Chamber* presents an exhilarating vision for progressive ascent. I'd like to think that this isn't a pipe dream.

—ELEANOR J. BADER

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# THE CITY OF MONSTERS CONFRONTS ITS HISTORY

*El Monstruo: Dread and Redemption in Mexico City*  
BY JOHN ROSS  
NATION BOOKS, 2009

When I was living in Mexico nine years ago, I caught a glimpse of the deteriorating “perfect dictatorship.”

The ruling single party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was staggering as electoral losses mounted and the rightist Party of National Action (PAN) — embodied by the cowboy hat- and belt buckle-wearing former Coca-Cola boss, Vicente Fox — took the presidency. I was in Atlixco, Puebla (south of Mexico City), working with a group of *maquiladora* workers to organize an independent union in their garment factory and oust a corrupt *charro* (cowboy) union controlled by the PRI.

The monster is Mexico City (known in Spanish as D.F., for *distrito federal*), and *El Monstruo: Dread and Redemption in Mexico City* is a brief history of Mexico through the monster’s eyes written by Nation and *La Jornada* contributor John Ross. Much of it focusing on the time period from the Mexican Revolution thorough the early 2000s, Ross’ book is part people’s history, part Gonzo journalism, with a wry and humorous style describing both uplifting and demoralizing events. Of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the disparity in wealth between the Mexican and U.S. economies, Ross writes, “the idea of getting hitched to an economy 25 times the size of Mexico’s seemed as perverse as letting a 10-ton American gorilla have its way with a skeletal Mexican burro.”

While not exhaustive, at some 400 pages *El Monstruo* is neither feathery nor Lonely Planet glib.

The Mexican Revolution was not kind to *el monstruo*, as Zapata and Villa shared an open disdain for and violent hostility to the city’s environs and inhabitants, known as *chilangos*. Villa sacked parts of the city, and Zapata hated the capital because of the amassed political and economic power that disen-

franchised his peasant-indigenous base. While it may be difficult for casual readers of Mexican history to follow the internecine death matches of the revolution, Ross makes it worth the read.

Ross’s best chapters detail the depravity and rot that is the PRI. For most of the 20th century, the PRI dominated Mexican politics with an iron fist. Termed the “perfect dictatorship” by rightist Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, the party controlled every aspect of society from farmer’s groups, street vendors and unions to who got a piece of garbage disposal. Past PRI leaders were notorious

writer Roberto Bolaño).

Ross underscores the earthquake of Sept. 19, 1985, which destroyed large swaths of D.F. and killed at least 10,000, with another anecdote about the PRI’s murderousness. Government workers entered “the ruins of the Mexico City prosecutor’s office to retrieve files and typewriters, [and] they found six bodies stuffed into the trunk of an agent’s car.” The bodies, covered in cigarette burns, were reputedly Colombian drug dealers.

At this point in Mexican history it was not surprising that the PRI murdered its enemies and dealt drugs — according to Ross the largest drug dealers were the D.F. police. I was nonetheless disappointed that Ross did not mention Indymedia journalist Brad Will’s death in Oaxaca at the hands of PRI-linked police officers in 2006.

When I worked on the union campaign in Puebla, the rot of the PRI-controlled *charro* union manifested itself literally. The union got the factory to contract lunch services to a PRI-connected caterer that gouged the owners and fed the workers putrid, worm-infested meals. On certain days large sections of the workforce went home with dysentery, which prompted a wildcat strike. The PRI-controlled state government got its revenge on the largely young female workforce by sending the riot police to kick some teenage girl ass. When I arrived representing United Students

Against Sweatshops, PRI lackeys took to the airwaves and claimed we were in town to disrupt the government and steal back Mexican jobs to the United States. Workers eventually organized the first independent *maquiladora* garment union in Mexican history.

Ross ends the book with the travesty of leftist presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador’s “loss” to the current right-wing PAN president in 2006. I was expecting a more robust investigation into the metrics of the electoral fraud by the PAN, but ended with the feeling that the PAN is taking on old PRI tactics.

*El monstruo* remains.

—BENNETT BAUMER



DANA VINDIGNI

for their greed and barbarity, and Ross’s writing revels in the political assassinations.

The PRI’s ruthlessness is recorded in Ross’s passages about the Oct. 2, 1968, Tlatelolco massacre of university students before the Mexico City Olympics. Like in Paris and New York, leftist students rebelled in revolutionary fervor against the establishment. Ross recounts the buildup to the student killings when 10,000 troops swept university buildings, arresting 557 students, and tells the remarkable story of an Uruguayan poet who holed up in a bathroom stall for three weeks, eating toilet paper to escape sure imprisonment and torture (the scene also appears in *The Savage Detectives* by Chilean

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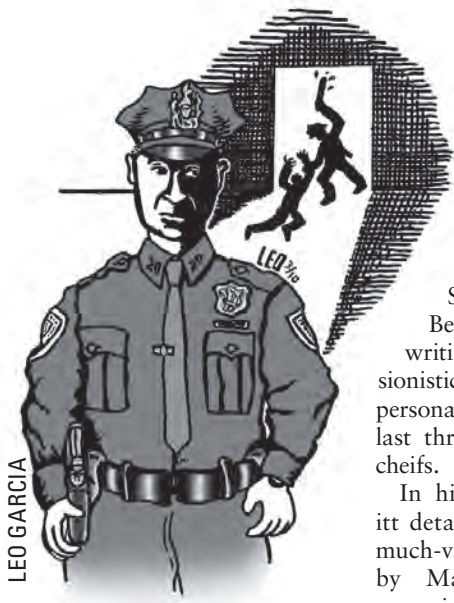
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*NYPD Confidential: Power and Corruption in the Country's Greatest Police Force*

BY LEONARD LEVITT

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, 2009

New Yorkers have often had to wait for gutsy cops to blow the whistle on abuses of power within the nation's largest police force. Fortunately, there is another source we can turn to for a hard-hitting look into the seamy side of the NYPD: Former *Newsday* police reporter and columnist Leonard Levitt.

In his new book, *NYPD Confidential*, Levitt follows the rise and fall of former Police Commissioners Lee Brown, Bill Bratton, Howard

Safir and the now-disgraced Bernie Kerik. While Levitt's writing style is somewhat impressionistic, we learn a lot about the personalities and practices of our last three mayor and their police chiefs.

In his 305-page account, Levitt details the introduction of the much-vaunted Compstat program by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's commissioner, William Bratton. Compstat — which, despite its name, isn't a computer system — uses maps to assign additional police to places in the city where there have been muggings and other crimes. It's been criticized as encouraging competition between precincts to show lower crime rates, and for discouraging crime reporting. Levitt initially lauded Compstat, but later became a critic. (In fact, Levitt's most recent columns follow the detectives who exposed the practice of downgrading crimes or refusing to accept a police report, and who now face police harassment as reprisal.)

Bratton, the first of Giuliani's three commissioners, reaped the credit for Compstat and brought down the homicide rate by 18 percent. He gloried in the attention, but unwittingly crossed a line

when a feature about him in the *New Yorker* implied that he, not Giuliani, was integral to that success. He was soon forced out and replaced by Giuliani's fire commissioner, Howard Safir.

Safir succeeded in reducing the homicide rate by half from the Dinkins days, but in doing so, he tripled the size of the Street Crimes Unit (which was renamed but not disbanded after a lawsuit). The aggressive approach of the SCU led directly to the death of Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo in a bout of contagion shooting in February 1999. Safir was also commissioner when Haitian immigrant Abner Louima was mistaken for someone who had punched a cop, arrested, taken to the bathroom of the 70th precinct for a "tune-up" (in departmental parlance) and sodomized by Officer Justin Volpe with a broken broomstick.

Safir was the first to clamp down on unfavorable press coverage. After the *New York Daily News* printed a cover photo of police manipulating the timing of a traffic light (to increase the number of tickets they could give out) in the Bronx, Safir barred the *Daily News* reporter from press conferences. But that was mild compared

to what happened to the photographer. That same day, police showed up at the man's house with a 13-year-old warrant and illegally released his history of arrests (not convictions) to the press.

Then comes the discredited Bernie Kerik, who used his post-9/11 fame to sell Taser stun guns to police departments around the country. His reward for the efforts? Kerik earned \$6.2 million when he sold his shares in Taser stock. The crime he is about to be jailed for involves the use of his office by a garbage carting company with mob ties, in exchange for which his Riverdale apartment was renovated to include a rotunda with a marble entryway.

Levitt documents the successes and failures of successive commissions tasked with rooting out police corruption, like the Dinkins-era Mollen Commission, reserving some of his harshest criticism for the kind of inter-commission competition that undermined this goal. And while Levitt shows awareness of race relations in the city, he describes the Diallo and Louima assaults as "tragic incidents," not as evidence of systematic police brutality. His narrative is motivated by a sincere concern for dangers individ-

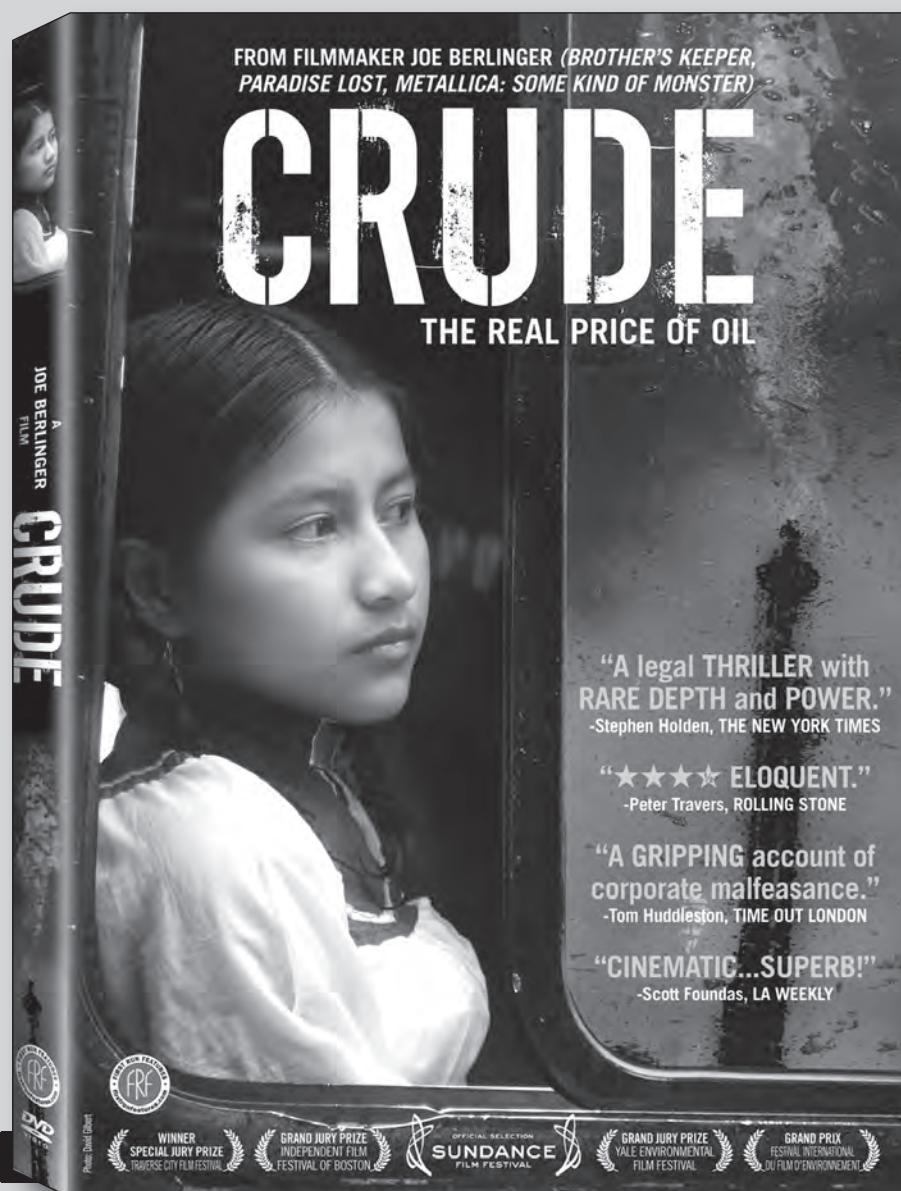
ual officers face, but the high point on Levitt's moral compass is making the city safe for tourists and shoppers by eliminating street crime.

To the credit of his editors at *Newsday*, Levitt was encouraged to cover the politics and policies behind police practices. The book provides tidbits like this: a 1994 survey of NYPD officers revealed that they "viewed the department's first priority as writing summonses. Holding down overtime was second. Fighting crime was seventh."

Levitt's columns were critical enough to lead Police Benevolent Association head Phil Caruso to call for a boycott of *Newsday*. In January 2007, Levitt found himself not only barred from One Police Plaza, but apparently a target of Ray Kelly and David Cohen's Intelligence Division. Levitt ascribes this animosity to the fact that he exposed a junket to Singapore and London taken by Deputy Commissioner for Counterterrorism Richard Falkenrath.

—ANN SCHNEIDER

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# THROUGH THE LENS: A NEW EXPLORATION OF NEW YORK

**T**hink the city isn't what it used to be? This spring, several venues around the city ask you to consider the question.

The Museum of African Diasporan Art opened an ambitious new show in February called **Gentrification: The Pink Elephant Speaks**. This 20-artist exhibit, curated by native Brooklynite Dexter Wimberly, sets out to be a "conversation" rather than a definitive analysis.

About 40 pieces are featured, in media ranging from video to sculpture to modified *New Yorker* cartoons. The photographs and

the talk quickly moved to health-care. Say what you will about the unlikelihood of the museum as a conversation starter — on one day, at least, it seemed to be working.

Set up to run until May 16, the show includes free or low-cost events such as a film screening, a small business owners' workshop and the requisite roundtable discussion.

A few degrees north, Brooklyn's abandoned industrial waterfront is getting a party in the deindustrialized neighborhood next door. **Photographer John Bartelstone** has a long and varied history with the

cameras.

Catch John at the March 24 launch party (and ask him about the disappearance of quality cookies from New York) or at Columbia University April 22. For the easily bored, the Navy Yard itself is just a few blocks out (fair warning: when I tried to go over in 2004, the cops weren't having it).

Finally, across the East River at Exit Art, the waterfront is explored in a show called **Waterpod: Autonomy and Ecology**, through April 10. The waterpod in question is a barge that traveled around the city's shores last summer, loaded

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PHOTOS: JOHN BARTELSTONE

abstract pieces resonate the most. Many speak without their captions, like one of an abandoned couch by the Sunset Park waterfront. In another corner, artist Sarah Nelson Wright shows abstract maps charting relocations to, from, and through Brooklyn of subjects she interviewed — think sharp, jolting lines alongside lists of reasons you'll recognize. There's a futuristic pod in the back into which visitors are encouraged to drop their wishes for a future Brooklyn.

The show also includes short research projects and photos from some Brooklyn high schools, which add a thought-provoking touch (although they could benefit from more context).

It was striking that the exhibit spurred a public conversation among a handful of attendees. Near the entrance, an older man discussed the value of housing as a right or as a commodity, before

city's buildings. An architect by trade, he spent 10 years at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, then moved on to photography. His form is aerial photography, spending more time flying in a helicopter with a camera than any human being has a right to. His 15 years spent photographing the Brooklyn Navy Yard make their way to us in a book, and a concurrent show at Powerhouse Books in Dumbo, going up March 18.

The work is tightly focused and magnificent — carefully constructed black-and-white photos, mostly large format, which sneak you into vast spaces that seem unimaginable. Stately and complex (you can't tell what most of the machines were used for) the black-and-white photos occupy a strange space in time. They feature a style often associated with 19th-century documentary combined with a sleekness reminiscent of IKEA, and breathtaking detail of contemporary large-format

with equipment to generate power, grow and cook food and dispose of waste — a vessel intended to be completely self-sustaining.

For such a utopian-sounding endeavor, the Waterpod had a bleaker genesis. Artist Mary Mattingly told *The New York Times* that she wanted to explore an alternative-future lifestyle in which "our resources on land grow scarcer and sea levels rise."

The show is composed of videos, photographs and journal entries that chronicle the Waterpod's journey around the five boroughs and the impact it had on the crew and visitors. If you didn't get a chance to see the pod last summer — here's a great second look.

—IRINA IVANOVA

For an interview with John Bartelstone, and other goodies, log on to [independent.org](http://independent.org).

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**THU MAR 18, 7PM • \$5 SUGG**  
PRESENTATION: TEAM COLORS: "ENGAGING CONTEMPORARY MOVEMENTS." Team Colors presents the efforts of organizing for change in the face of current capitalist and movement crises, and a discussion of militant research and radical movements.

**TUE MAR 23, 7PM • \$5 SUGG**  
DISCUSSION: DIRECT ACTION IN HEALTHCARE ACTIVISM. Join Katie Robbins of Healthcare-NOW!, Dr. Laura Boylan of Physicians for a National Health Program, and Laurie Wen of ACT UP in a discussion about bringing the single-payer option back into the national dialogue about healthcare.

**WED MAR 31, 7PM • \$5 SUGG**  
PERFORMANCE: EMERGING FROM BROOKLYN. The Numu Arts Collective will present a night of innovative, new works of drama, fiction and poetry performed by North Brooklyn's finest emerging writers.

**THU APRIL 1, 7PM • \$5 SUGG**  
PRESENTATION: GRAVEYARD OF EMPIRES. As the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan grows, come out for a presentation by Afghan-American sisters Laimah and Wazmah Osma and learn about the country that is the graveyard of empires.

**MON APRIL 5, 7PM • \$5 SUGG**  
FILM SCREENING: HAITI. Join Jocelyn Perry for a 30-minute screening and discussion of *Haiti: The Struggle of Humanity*, in which she interviews children in a Haitian orphanage (built by her grandparents' congregation) about their hopes for the future.

For a complete list of daily events or to purchase a gift card, visit [bluestockings.com](http://bluestockings.com). Please support your local community bookstore and café!

*The*  
**PEN and the SWORD**

Conversations with  
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by David Barsamian

Introductions by  
Eqbal Ahmad and  
Nubar Hovsepian

In conversation with David Barsamian, director of Alternative Radio, these collected interviews with the internationally renowned Palestinian scholar and critic Edward Said (1935–2003) cover a broad range of topics, from Said's groundbreaking work of literary scholarship, *Orientalism*, to music and popular culture.

These conversations span the years 1987–94, a pivotal era in the Palestinian liberation movement during which Said testifies with stunning insight and eloquence to the crimes of the Israeli occupation and the betrayals of the PLO leadership.

Following the 1993 Oslo accords, Said tells Barsamian, "The idea of a collective memory is now rapidly becoming disallowed even by Palestinians. That's something which I find unacceptable." From this collection emerges a history that is both haunting—imbued with knowledge of loss and desire for justice for all Palestinians—and urgently needed to understand today's conflict.

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